WOVEN IN THE TAPESTRY

BY

EMILY POST

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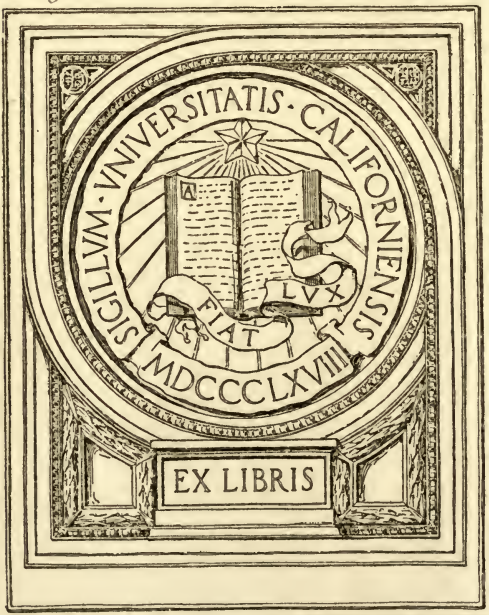

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EMILY POST

New York
MOFFAT, YARD AND COMPANY
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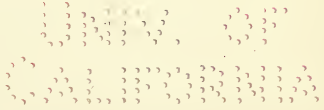

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To
the memory of

BRUCE PRICE

Not as being worthy, but as the best she has,
this book is dedicated by
his daughter.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THESE are the tales of Ateria, a country which long ago lay on the distant borderlands; of the pagan King Thyaterion and his daughter the Princess Alaëia; of the Hermit in the forest, and of the stranger who came to live for a while as the Hermit's disciple. And also these are the tales of those who lived in the village, and of those who lived in the City, and lastly of the Forest itself, and of the Gardens of the King.

There has been found in the ruins of the Monastery—that once stood between the City and the Forest—a map, which makes plain the seemingly conflicting stories of the ancient chroniclers.

Kahras, the scholar, wrote of a great city of many thousand souls; of paved streets, temples of marble, and buildings of stone. He said that the King's domain lay directly against the boundary of the City, divided from it by a wall

of massive stone, with watch towers set at equal distances, and at the base a moat, wide as a river.

A guarded draw-bridge pierced the center of this wall, and all who went to see the King were led by soldiers through innumerable courtyards, long passageways and other walled enclosures, until finally they arrived at an inner court where mounted horsemen were ranged, spear in hand, like statues wrought in bronze.

Leading from this court, and blazing with the light of countless torches, was the throne room: a great vaulted chamber, at the far end of which stood the throne, high-crowned upon a flight of steps. Up these steps on either side were lined the body-guard of the King; clean-limbed men from the country close beneath the sun, like images of polished ebony, clothed in silks and hung with ornaments of gold; and in their hands they held drawn cimiters wrought splendidly and incrusted with jewels. Behind these blacks were soldiers, and behind them again torch-bearers ranged themselves along walls hung with tapestries and the skins of beasts. At the

feet of King Thyaterion sat Torqueo the jester.

To the right of the King's daïs was a second, lower one, for the Queen and her attendants.

Of the Princess Alaëia, Kahras wrote that he had seen her stand beside the imperial throne like a statue of some goddess carved in ivory and hung with offerings of gems; for she was robed in jewels, from the diadem that crowned her head to the golden sandals on her feet: lifeless she might have been, save for her clear-gazing eyes, which seemed to penetrate the mind of each man in the multitude that made the pageant at the foot of her father's throne.

So much for the account of Kahras! Now, besides Kahras there was another scribe, named Ghan. Ghan lived in a thatched hut on the edge of a river along whose opposite banks were the Gardens of the King. These gardens he had seen always—for leading directly from the village where he lived, was a wide bridge over which the villagers might go at any time to the palace, which stood at the summit of many ter-

races, where its marble towers and colonnades gleamed through the trees.

Ghan did not write of a vaulted throne room, nor of pomp and ceremonial: by his account the King sat chiefly in an open court walled with vines and overlooking the terraces of the garden. Torqueo, the jester, was always near him, but there were neither courtiers nor soldiers.

Often and often had Ghan seen the Princess; and he wrote of her as a blithesome maid sitting upon her father's knee, her arm clasped about his neck, and listening to all discourse with eager eyes, her face a changing mirror of many moods. "She was indeed," Ghan wrote, "a sunny-souled Princess, our Alaëia; who, little more than a child, was no less the Princess; and being the Princess, was no less that dearest maid who held the hearts of the village people in her own.

In addition to these two opposed accounts is one of a traveller who journeyed through a vast forest and brought back word of an enchanted Princess in a garden surrounded by unscalable cliffs. This was all the traveller could

learn, though he came to a point beyond which he could advance no further, where he was told lay this very garden.

Then there is the record left by a ship's captain who came once to an unknown coast, which he afterwards learned was Ateria; but he saw there neither buttressed walls, nor gardens, nor enchanted forest—only a rocky shore broken by sandy beaches.

Now at last with the aid of the map, it is easy to see that all these accounts were true: In the very center, like a jewel, lay the Garden of the King. The southeastern portion was low and sloped with sandy beaches into the sea; the northern part of the eastern boundary was a rocky coast. All of the garden rose gently toward the north where high walls cut it off completely from the City.

The castle on the southern side stood free and clear with terraces sloping gently down to the river and the village. In the west, steep mountains made an impassable barrier between the garden and the forest whose only gateway was the Labyrinth of the Princess, through which she alone could go from the Gar-

den into the Forest. Somewhere between the Village and the City, in the heart of the Forest, cut off on the north and the south by mountain chains, was the Hermit's hut.

Such was a portion of the kingdom of Ateria during the reign of Thyaterion, last of the pagan rulers, but not the last of their blood; for that has descended in many noble lines even to this day.

THE GARDEN

I

THE GARDEN

LONG, long ago, so long indeed that Earth herself was young, there was made a forest garden—a garden that Nature had planned in a girlhood mood, and into which she had put all the gladness of a summer holiday.

The tree tops shot up gaily, each as it pleased; the little creepers wandered fearlessly, embraced the trees and plants they loved, and ran unchecked among the flowers and over the moss. Then Nature laughed! a happy, joyous laugh.

Now high up on the mountain top a little spring lay dozing in his bed of rock: but at the laugh of Nature he raised his head, and full of curiosity, peeped over the mountain's rim. And as he peeped, Nature laughed again so happily that the little spring bubbled up with laughter too, and straightway ran

over the edge of the mountain down into the very heart of the garden; carrying the glad news all the way to the river in the valley below.

The years went on, and Nature grew from a joyous girl to a busy mother; but still she loved to spend here, amid her own wild bloom, each moment spared from toil in all the gardens of mankind. Of these latter the most beautiful by far was the great King's Garden which stood next this forest tangle, where the highest tops of the forest trees overlooked the long straight walks, terrace steps, fragrant plants, and smooth round trees, and told the wild wood plants of all this stately beauty. Then the forest green things sighed, "Oh, why were we not chosen for the Garden of the King?"

Now as it chanced, the great King's gardener came one day to the edge of this playground of Nature's girlhood, and stood amazed that the forest held this beauty in its depth. Then his eyes sparkled, and clapping his hands he cried: "O ho! but this will make a garden worthy of a King—a garden such as the eye of man has never beheld!"

All the trees and vines and plants heard, and their leaves danced airily in their gladness, for now at last they were to be in that wonderful unknown garden of which the highest tree tops whispered. But when cruel sharp things came in the hands of men, they were afraid, and with quaking stems cried out to the brook to quickly run and find dear Mother Nature! But the Forest was now under the discipline of Man. So her children tried to be brave by whispering one to the other, "We are to be a garden such as the eye of Man has never yet beheld!"

All this while the soft moss carpet was pulled up, and bricks and pebbles pressed down hard upon the open side of Earth; trees were torn from her resisting arms, the trailing culprit vines, that tried to run and hide beneath the plant's protecting leaves, were caught and bound to hard, relentless stakes. But through all the ache and change, with the faithful love of a mother, Nature watched, awaiting the moment when she should be allowed to return. Then with her healing touch she cured the hurts and laid her soothing hand

upon the straightened banks of that babbling messenger, the brook, in whose ripples the sound of that first day's laughter would mingle always with the soft veiled sigh of one who has lived and seen.

At last the garden was finished, and the great King came with all his court to see. And it *was* the most beautiful garden the eye of man had ever beheld! The flowers that had lived grew to a fuller beauty; the trees were round with perfect symmetry, not sending jagged shoots in ill proportion up to meet the sky: all was unity and perfection.

And the King marvelled and was pleased, and around the neck of the man that had done this thing he hung a golden chain.

But a wood-thrush sat on a willow bough, looking in vain for that topmost branch of the highest tree that the sun's rays had first kissed each morning! And his notes piped low as he alone saw, deep hidden under the vines' luxuriant growth, the nails and cords that bound them to the trellis.

THE STONE IDOL

II

THE STONE IDOL

ON a hill above the Palace, at the end of an avenue of gigantic trees, stood the image of a pagan God. He was hewn from stone of a greyish white, and was sitting as tailors do; his arms outstretched as though he might but that moment have threaded the needle of destiny with a new thread of life, to weave into the tapestry of the Universe. His stone eyes stared unblinkingly, serenely, into space; and upon his lips there was a broad smile—a carved stone smile.

When the Princess was a little child she often begged that she might go to see the "happy man" who always laughed when she was near; and she used to prattle to him and include him in the games she played in the patch of sunshine at his feet.

Perhaps it was because as a little child she had loved him, that when she was growing to young womanhood and her soul began to make its question marks upon the slate of her consciousness, she used to stand for hours resting her elbow on the Idol's knee and look above the lips into the unblinking eyes that stared into space.

"Ah thou dear God," she thought, "I would I had a portion of thy wisdom; a portion of the knowledge of truth, of which thou art thyself the emblem! Thou sittest with thine arms outstretched in benediction, thine eyes look fearlessly into the future, thine unfading smile foretells the best, the happiest side of life."

The more the Princess stood before the Idol, the more fervent she became, and soon she brought him offerings and filled the wrought bronze incense braziers. And through the burning incense, she seemed to see his smile grow broader and his eyes look down upon her with loving kindness; until at last she prayed that he might be alive, that he might take her by the hand and talk to her.

"Tell me, tell me, all the things I long to know—or send me some wise counsellor! Not one who prates of Court and seemly manners, but one with understanding heart, and soul, and mind, who will take my hand and lead me through the gardens in the sunlight, and sit with me beside the river and tell me all I cannot find in books—Ah, books are dry like powdered grain, and I am thirsty!"

So she prayed; and brought him offerings, until one day as she watched the incense burn and the fragrant smoke arise and melt into the air; the red gold rays of the setting sun filtered through an opening in the archway of trees, and shone with ruddy brilliance upon the Idol's face.

The Princess held her breath, believing that the sunset glow was life and animation within the image; but the sun's rays, pointing higher, became an aureole, then a canopy, and finally withdrew. The last breath of incense melted cold and clear, and suddenly she knew that he was but an image of stone with sightless eyes and grinning lips, and that all the vision of his majestic peace and

fathomless wisdom was in her own heart. In violent anger she struck the image again and again until her strength was spent and she fell prostrate at his feet.

But the stone eyes of the Idol stared unblinkingly, serenely into space; and upon his lips there was a broad smile—a carved stone smile.

THE ARTIST AND THE HERMIT

III

THE ARTIST AND THE HERMIT

AT the edge of the village, where the hills spread in a widening radius to the forest on one side and the sand-dunes on the other, where the rolling meadows came to his very door, dwelt Aru the artist. He always sang as he worked, because he loved his pictures better than anything else—better even than the pretty maid with the long fair tresses, who lived in the cottage where the roses climbed. He painted her portrait many times, and grew with each attempt more self-complacent.

As he stood one day before her latest portrait, putting here a touch and there a stroke, the smile grew broad upon his lips, and throwing down his brush he cried, "Ah, truly I am a great artist, and this my masterpiece!" He

sauntered gaily to the door, and looking up the village street, decided on a holiday. "I will go into the Forest," he thought, "the day is young, perchance I may reach the Hermit's hut."

As he passed singing through the village, the people said one to another, "See! how happy is Aru, the painter. What a fine thing it is to be great!" And as Aru went on climbing the steep path which led over the mountains into the Forest, his mood became so merry that he sang louder than ever. He went on and on until at last he saw the smoke of the Hermit's hut in the distance. Quickening his pace he crossed a bridge that spanned a deep gorge, through which the river plunged, then, following the level bank upon the farther shore, he came to the hut. The door was shut, but nothing daunted, he rapped loudly, calling, "It is I, Aru the artist!" as though it were indeed an honor for the Hermit to have such a guest.

The door opened, and the Hermit, like a living portrait, stood within the lintel's frame. His hood was drawn far over his face, so that his countenance

was blurred in deep shadow, but he bade Aru enter, asking him how fared he and his art.

Aru needed no second bidding, with head erect and fluent tongue he told of his ability in handling light and shade and form and color, until, encouraged by his own recital, he no longer hesitated to declare his genius to be unequalled.

"Indeed," the Hermit said, "and canst thou exceed in skill the great masters of the past as well as the lesser ones of thine own day?"

Pressing the grey wall of his hut, an unseen door swung open, revealing an inner chamber, on the smooth stone walls of which were paintings of such surpassing excellence, that Aru stood as one bereft of speech before the power of the master who had worked these wonders. In discouragement his head sank on his breast, and his pride, which but a moment since had shone with such sure brilliancy, was extinguished as the light of a fallen star.

"It cannot be," he cried, "that such a thing was done by man! Surely this is but a vision, that thou hast brought to earth from higher spheres. Tell me,

was it man or spirit who spread these colors and made this living wall?"

The Hermit answered, "These paintings, Aru, were done by the painter Abbaris, who as his years grew ripe retired from the world and lived to the fulness of his span of life, an anchorite, in this very hut. These last wonders were thus accomplished by man, mortal as thyself—"

But Aru heard no more. He fled with downcast eyes through the forest where he had passed so joyously in the morning. Again in his studio night followed day, and day came after night many times, but Aru did no work. What use to strive, he thought, since he could never equal the painter Abbaris.

He went for consolation to the pretty maid in the rose-covered cottage; but she, scarce recognizing Aru in this doleful mien, found him far less pleasing than before, when telling of his masterpiece, wherein her face should be the wonder of future generations.

She smiled and cast alluring glances out of her velvet eyes, but he came not under their charm, then she was merry and tried to make him laugh, but he

would not. She threw him little queries about his pictures, such as he never had failed to seize, but his answers were like futile revolutions of a windmill when the wind is dying down. So the pretty maid shrugged her shoulders, glanced at her reflection in the glass, and then began to weave a new hat for the youth with the smiling glances, who drove the bullock cart.

Finally in desperation Aru ran back to the Hermit. "Alas, alas!" he cried, "why didst thou show me that greater man's creation! For now—though idleness destroy my life, I can never paint again!"

But the Hermit's eyes glowed. "Still thy thoughts bend ever inward, bound hard and fast upon thyself. Fool!" he said, "come with me."

He left the hut and the painter followed dumbly a path which began a steep ascent. After a while they came to an open space, and the Hermit paused. A great panorama of mountains spread before them: snow-tipped peaks and sheer straight sides cut hundreds of feet downward to the rushing cataracts of the river that looked, from

where they stood, like the little stream of water running from the eaves of a village hut after the rain.

The Hermit turned from the sublimity of the view and looked upon the artist. "Fool! doubly—fool! Thou art a tall man—far above the middle height, art thou not? And yet compare thy puny stature with that of yonder mountains. Wouldst thou, because thou canst not stand, as they, measuring from earth to heaven, crawl on thy belly like an earth-worm? Down in the valley there lies a little stone—must it roll itself under the first cart wheel that passes because it too cannot be a mountain? Why thinkest thou solely of the measure of thine own worth? Hast thou lost aught since thou camest, like a frog puffed up, before me? Why need truth annihilate thee, since truth forever must remain the object of attainment?"

As the Hermit spoke Aru looked up to the mountains' height, and then down to where he imagined lay the little stone; and all at once the veil was lifted and he saw clearly!

Aru went back to his paintings, but whether they were worse or better, there

was ever much difference of opinion. One thing is true; that he never was as great as the painter Abbaris, and another, that he no longer so easily pleased the people in the Village. But though perhaps he did not sing as loudly as he used, it was no sign that his heart was not in what he did—but his joy was of another kind and his work meant what a man's work must when a man has beheld even a glimpse of the depth and the height.

THE LABYRINTH

IV

THE LABYRINTH

WHEN the Princess Alaëia drew near her fifteenth birthday, she dreamed three wonderful dreams. In the first, she was a fish swimming in a Forest river, and as she swam near the surface of the water, a hind came down to the river to drink. In the overhanging branches of a tree she saw a bird with sleek grey plumage; and the bird must have been singing, for the grey ruff under his throat was dancing.

In the second dream the Princess was the hind leaping through the Forest and along the banks of the river; in the third dream she was the bird singing in the tree! so joyously that she awoke with laughter on her lips and the last trill of the song in her throat.

The memory of the Forest was so

clear that she wondered during the days that followed whether her dream had been no dream, but rather a vision of previous births wherein she had been some wild wood's creature. Gradually her longing for the Forest grew, until she looked at the dividing mountains as though they must vanish like a wall of mist before the sun of her desire. But all along the mountain border on the west the sides were sheer, and she looked in vain for a path.

At last, as she sat at the edge of the little stream running through the garden that once had been Nature's own, she leaned far over the bank so that the color of her dress danced on the surface of the water, and suddenly, as though the soft whispering sigh of the gurgling stream broke into song, she seemed to hear: "Lab—lab—labyr—r r—rinth!"

Now in the garden of the King there *was* a Labyrinth whose tangled secret might be known to the Princess only, and in this there is a tale:

As each young daughter of the royal line grew to be a maid, there developed in her mind the picture of the Labyrinth; so that she knew—and knew not

how she knew—the secret of its winding way.

But also as each Princess had become a wife, the image faded, so that none again could find the way until the next young daughter of the reigning King, following her inherited impulse, ran lightly through the intricate maze and stood for the first time upon the threshold of the Forest—alone.

Once, many years before Alaëia's birth, a Princess in the Forest loved a knight; . . . and she was frail—she tried to retrace her steps, but in the Labyrinth the plan that had been so clear in her maiden mind vanished from her memory. Bewildered, she wandered back and forth between relentless walls, and never could she find the path which she had lost. Ever afterwards the entrance to the Labyrinth bore this inscription carved in stone, though no one knows by whom or when:

"Those who are born to high places
dare not falter.
Those who are free, are bound by
stronger bonds than chains."

And now as the time had come for this mystery to be made clear to the Princess Alaëia, even as it had been to all the daughters of her race, suddenly she turned from the purling stream and cried aloud:

"Why have I not known before that between those clumps of roses climbing over that great grey rock is an open space; whence leads, amid a tangled way of thorns, a road as clear and true as the path of the rising moon upon the Sea!"

Then straight as the bee flies to the entrance of the hive, she sped to the foot of the hanging gardens; between the curtain of protecting thorns she passed into the inner court. There before her was the way, but for a moment she paused, reading the inscription as though it had been carved for her alone, and in her heart she whispered, "It is well." Then, like children who, having said their prayers, turn suddenly to play, she sped through the winding paths; each opening arch that led aright, she took unfalteringly, each turn to right or left she made without delay, until the last turn led her to the

hollow tree which made a gateway on the Forest side. Within the opening of the tree she stood, her gaze wandering through the Forest's green to where she saw upon a river's bank a hut. A man in dun-colored gown and hood was standing in the doorway. He neither moved nor spoke as the Princess drew near.

Under the shadow of his hood, his eyes seemed to gaze out of great depths, and to penetrate through and far beyond everything that they saw. And then just as the picture of the Labyrinth had come before her mind, the Princess knew that she was standing before the Hermit of the Forest. Her voice came whispering as though she feared the sound might wake her from a dream, "Wilt thou teach me, Master?"

The Princess felt the Hermit's understanding measure every hope and thought of her young mind, and as she stood within the radius of his gaze she heard his voice, and it was unlike the voice of any man that she had ever heard—it seemed as much a portion of the Forest as the rushing streams, the

sighing wind, the whispering leaves; it seemed an echo still vibrating from the ages before man was. And then the meaning of his words gradually filtered through her vague perceptions and the Princess heard: "It is written thou shalt come when thou hast aught to ask, yet this remember: thy need alone may demand an answer, thy desire must remain unfilled. In the furrows through which the ploughshare has passed, may grain be sown; trees are planted only when one has digged deep into the earth. In the Forest thou shalt be called not Alaëia (royal) but Laïa (free)."

The Princess waited eagerly for further words—but the Hermit only smiled.

THE CLOTH OF LIFE

V

THE CLOTH OF LIFE

AS a mist descends with increasing thickness upon the land, so dissatisfaction descended upon the spirit of the Princess.

On a scroll which the Hermit gave her she read of heroes who had done noble things; and the more she read, the more weary she became of the daily repetition of her own existence, so that her heart was filled not alone with the desire to do some great and noble deed, but to do this deed without delay. She stood at the foot of the gardens, gazing wistfully at the river, hoping perhaps to see some one whom she might rescue from its depths. But the water flowed happily on, carrying no heavier burden than its own ripples. She thought also of rushing into a burning dwelling to save imperilled children; but upon the

river's other bank the homes of the villagers lay peaceful in the sun.

The Princess walked moodily toward the gallery of the Queen; but half-way there her imagination pictured maids of honor seated at their embroidery frames, prating of their own virtues and others' foibles, and with a shrug she turned in the direction of the Labyrinth. Through the gardens strolled a courtier, who held out to her a rose and turned a verse upon the flower's semblance to the color in her cheeks.

Without a word she took his offering as though she might have plucked it from a branch, and walked on quickly to the hanging gardens. Once in the Labyrinth the Princess seemed to vanish, and Laïa ran straight to the Hermit's hut.

The Hermit sat at his table, drawing upon a parchment; he did not appear to see the Princess, who seated herself on a bench beside the door and waited patiently. At last the Hermit turned and listened to the story of her useless life and her desire to do some heroic deed.

"Oh, why," sighed the Princess, "is

there nothing given me to do? Each day of my life goes mincing by, hand in hand with the triviality of its opportunities. Even this rose has had its full perfection marred by the verses of that flaxen-headed puppet!"

She held the rose a moment; then put it in the stone pitcher of the Hermit. "Ah, now," she said, "you should be happy, you rose! for you are steeped in clear, fresh water from the Forest spring, while I—" she broke off with another sigh and her eyes were full of tears.

But the Hermit, as he watched her, smiled. "Granting my power to give thee thy desire, what wouldst thou have?"

"Show me how I may do some great and noble deed. Show me how I may be given a chance to write my name in the book of Life. Set me a task that I may quickly do! I care not how severe the test."

"The moment is not come. There is no Giant's task thrown down upon a given part of earth, for thee to do. Yet there is much that thou canst every hour accomplish: In the many little

threads thou weavest in thy daily life, each very small alone, but slowly adding to all that have gone before, thread by thread thou mayest weave a tapestry."

"Alas! I fear that when the Fates wove my life's beginning, they made an empty loom!"

The Hermit, drawing his hood far over his face, stood pondering. "Come," he said at last, "look into my fire!"

The Princess lay down upon a skin spread upon the earthen floor, and looked as she was told into the flame which burned, first yellow, then red, then white: at last a grey vapor seemed to rise and fill the chamber and then all at once the Princess found herself in an enormous hall.

All along the sides were transparent cases in which were hung pieces of cloth of different shapes and sizes; some of them beautifully embroidered with threads of gold, while some were mere handfuls of worthless rags that might have been gathered from a waste heap.

Down the center of the hall stood many looms, and before them, each weaving in her own apportioned hour, sat radiant beings clothed in white, and

upon their heads were stars, whose effulgence filled the hall with light. Beside each loom hung shears of Destiny, each guarded by a sign of the Zodiac. In the midst was the Angel of Life, writing.

The Princess gazed at all within the hall, and then out through the great window at the end where she saw the Heavens very near and many other stars upon the blue path, and, as she gazed, there entered a guardian angel with a baby in his arms. He approached the star-being then working at her loom, who took the shears from beside the sign of the Zodiac, standing near, and cut out all the cloth that she had made.

Then a strange thing happened: no sooner was the cloth severed from the loom in which it had been spun than it appeared hung up in an almost empty case near the Princess; a small piece of grey cloth cut into an exact square.

Meanwhile the Angel of Life wrote in his great book and then said to the guardian angel, "To the home of Mijj the Cobbler."

A moment later another guardian angel entered with a baby, but the star

then weaving had her loom nearly full, and of cloth of gold.

"To the home of the Grand Duke Taros!" the Angel said, and then he answered the thoughts of the Princess:

"Each life as it is born on Earth is given a piece of cloth; each receives the quantity then in the loom, woven under his star, and cut by the shears of his Destiny. The size and quality of cloth depend upon the Fate that casts the hour of his birth; but the change in the piece of cloth once it is in the case of development depends upon the effort of the one to whom it belongs.

"But now thou sawest a fragment of poor material given to the cobbler's son, and a large piece of gold damask to the heir of the Grand Duke: yet when they shall be taken out of these cases to be distributed in the greater halls, of what mortals call Death, the grey piece may be so richly wrought as to become part of the Tapestry of the Universe, and the cloth of gold so ruthlessly cut and gashed, with one pattern tried and then another, that it is fit for nought in the end but the waste heap of ruined lives."

"And my piece!" cried the Princess. "What am I doing with mine?"

But the Angel answered not—and as she asked again, the hall vanished and the Princess awoke in the Hermit's hut.

But somewhere far away she seemed still to hear the Angel's voice:

"Every minute spent in doing the thing which is thy work to do, every minute spent in leading gladly thy daily life, embroiders in gold thy piece of cloth; every brooding discontent makes a tangled thread, every wish to shape thy life into one that is not thine own makes a wasteful tear."

The Princess looked slowly from the fire to the eyes of the Hermit, hardly knowing whether the Hermit, the Angel, or her own heart had spoken.

The Princess sighed, then smiled, and then went singing through the Labyrinth.

The Hermit stood in the doorway of his hut; watching the river as it flowed serenely by, and his eyes were like the eyes of the Angel of Life.

TWO POETS

VI

TWO POETS

AMONG the many boys who had been pupils in the Monastery, were two that Kahras, the sage, remembered longer than all the rest. One of these boys was named Arjis and the other, Tiv. Few scholars had ever made such faultless copies of the sacred books; none had ever shown such understanding of the thoughts inscribed, and Kahras hung great hope upon the future of these two: he expected much of Arjis, but he was sure that Tiv would go far indeed.

As for the boys themselves, each had it in his heart to be a great poet; each thought of the helpful and inspiring messages he would write, and each saw in his imagination future pupils copying on parchment his teachings, even as

he now was copying those of the great scribes, and of the Hermit of the Forest.

Both of these boys were very poor, and as it happened a similar blow fell suddenly upon each. Their fathers died leaving a mother and younger sister destitute. To each the thought of turning to an occupation was like giving up life itself, and in despair they went apart and sat at dusk together on the bank of the river which flowed at the foot of the Monastery.

At last Arjis spoke: "Ah, Tiv, I know that I was sent into the world to be a poet; such another perchance as he whose learning we have studied from the parchment. See my hands! They are not brown and strong, but frail and white; my shoulders are not broad, but narrow and such as bend most easily over the tablets. Of what use might such as I be in the world of men? Look also, Tiv, upon the deeper side: what is one life or one family compared with the endurance of a mind whose wisdom shall be handed down from generation to generation? To force me into any other tasks than those for which I am by nature fitted, would be compelling a

fish to live on land—all my gifts would be wasted."

"Alas, Arjis, I too feel as thou dost, and I see no future standing with her arms outstretched to me, save that one which thou and I had always thought we were approaching hand in hand—but the Mother! and little Kaia, whose baby lips have lisped her brother's name scarce two short summers—I cannot see them starve."

"How thinkest thou to prevent their starving, if thou wilt abandon those gifts which the Gods have given thee? Develop that which is best in thee; thou wilt find that other hands will toil in place of thine——"

"Forbear, Arjis! I go at dawn into the City!"

"And what thinkest thou to do when thou hast reached its dire midst?"

"I know not yet; but I must find what work I may. Through this last night I will remain upon this bank above the river that I love, and dream my last dreams in the shadow of these walls I had hoped might shelter me for many years. In the dawn of the coming day I go. If the poet in me is dead to-night,

at least there has been born a son. Some day I may return to the life for which my soul longs, but now I must go to the Mother and little Kaia."

Many years later in the City lived two men: one the great Arjis of whom all the world has heard; whose poems have been sung by men working in the fields, by mothers with their children in their arms. Poems in which he has told of a beautiful life of right doing, appealing so strongly to the hearts of the people that they honored him as only second to the Hermit. And the City appointed a special day to decorate the tomb of his mother and sister who so pitifully had died while the poet was still a boy, too young to earn the means of their support. The other, Tiv, a laborer, lived in a little cottage on the outskirts of the City, a clean, well-kept abode surrounded by the flowers of its little garden; and within there dwelt a contented woman.

One day the woman said, "My son, when thou wert young, thou wert ever dreaming with thy pen, and when I asked thee what the characters might mean, thou didst read to me most beau-

tiful things. Why dost thou never write such thoughts now that thou art a man?"

Tiv stroked her hair that she might not see his eyes. "Thou art happy, Mother, art thou not? Thou hast known no want, neither thou nor Kaia, hast thou?"

"Ah no, my son, not even from the first; and now we have all our hearts desire, except to see thy face all radiant as it was wont to be, when thou didst repeat thy poems to me. Why, Tiv, dost thou not make poems any more? Thou mightst become a poet, even as Arjis—— I would not dare to say so great as he; yet still a poet!"

But Tiv kissed his mother's silver hair and smiled, a thing that was rare with him. "Perhaps I am a poet, Mother, who knows! May not he be a poet whose poems have been lived instead of written? Far up in the Heavens the Angel of Life may be writing the great poem for me, and its theme thy happiness!"

And all at once his Mother clasped him in her arms—she knew not why, except that she felt something which she could not understand.

THE PRINCESS AND THE JESTER

VII

THE PRINCESS AND THE JESTER

THE noon sun, spreading his drowsy warmth through the trellis-work of leaves which canopied the atrium of the palace, and the water softly plashing in the fountain, had put the King to sleep.

At some distance Torqueo, the Jester, was pouring milk into a dish from which a puppy had begun to lap. The Princess, removing her arm from about the neck of her sleeping father, crossed softly to Torqueo and the puppy. She sat upon the further edge of the fountain, watching the little hound, who, having finished his milk, straightway went to sleep. Idly she dipped her hand into the water; whereupon the goldfish scattered like streaks of light.

"Foolish things!" she smiled—"yet

they are not the only creatures that start away in fear at shadows, eh, Torqueo?"

Torqueo's eyes and bells danced like the flutter of butterflies' wings as he babbled, "A thing is fearful in the eyes of those that do fear it; though they that fear are seldom in more than little fear!"

"What mean all thy fearful words?" laughed the Princess.

"That new words being dear, I pay the same ones over as often as I may! But here comes one who can well afford extravagance, for phrases spring newborn upon his lips."

The young Duke Artaras, handsomest of the courtiers, entered airily; laughter died upon his lips at the sight of his sleeping majesty. He seated himself upon a cushion at the fountain's base, and his eyes gazed hungrily at the sleeping puppy who, like the little nerveless lump he was, had let himself be picked up by the Princess without so much as opening his eyes. His stubby little jaw moved up and down as though he dreamed of lapping milk—but he knew no difference be-

tween the marble flagging and a silken lap. The royal fingers gently stroking his soft little coat might have been the caresses of his mother—or blowing leaves—he neither knew nor cared.

The Princess looked from the little beast to the eyes of the Duke and their expression held her glance.

"Why do you look so searchingly? What do you seek, Artaras?"

"Only that which all men seek—which I am seeking ever! Taking all that I can make my own—whether it falls my way, or whether I must needs pursue."

"Its name?"

"Happiness!"

The eyes of the Princess gazed far away and she held the little sleeping hound against her cheek.

"Torqueo!" she said, "tell us, what is happiness?"

"To have plenty to eat!—that is what the puppy thinks!"

"Nay, but what dost thou think?"

"Love—and all the letters writ in capitals! That is what the young Artaras thinks."

The Princess frowned. "I ask thee, Fool, what is happiness?"

"And thy Fool has answered twice, and summed the happiness of two! Third then, the Princess thinks to find it in philosophy!" His shoulders shook with mirth.

The Princess looked wistfully into his merry face. "Aye, but tell me what is thine own!"

"The same as the Hermit's."

"That is the drollest jest thou hast ever made."

"In truth it is; for it is no jest at all!"

Artaras cast upon the Princess a laughing glance, but behind the Jester's mask the Princess searched for other thoughts.

"Explain, Torqueo, wherein the happiness of the Hermit and the Fool resemble, for surely wisdom and folly are opposites!"

The Jester laid his bauble against his nose as he wagged his head. "All of humanity goes skipping by like tight-rope dancers, with the cord on which they prance likely to be cut at any moment. At one pole (in the shade, if you will) sits the Hermit, and at the other pole, diverting the crowd, sits the Fool!

All of humanity which loves, hates, succeeds or is cast down, includes neither fools nor hermits. There is but one difference between the sage and the fool—" Torqueo took an apple out of his pocket and continued between bites—"one feeds his soul that he may exist in the next world—the other feeds his stomach that he may exist in this! So, since the two extremes are but matters of feeding, put the world at table and you have the philosophy of happiness in a nutshell."

The Duke laughed. "How may that be, Fool? Come to the pith of thy subject, if it have any!"

"Listen, it is a tale as profound as the Fool's wisdom: Draw then a banquet table. Upon one side there is a puppy, upon the next a child, at the third a youth, and upon the fourth a sage—or a Fool, whichever it may please you!"

"Nay, then, we will have it a Fool, since none but a Fool would suppose such a table's company."

"Well spoken for a Duke! The Fool will leave thee his bells when he journeys further."

"Peace, Torqueo, and on with thy tale!"

"It would have been despatched ere now if thou hadst but let me continue the discourse! In the center of the table is a crystal bowl containing that which seems to each the very food which he most hungers for. Now mark how each receives his share:

"A portion is given to the puppy, who laps his down with shortest speed; then, puppylike, he goes to sleep, and it might as well have never been, because there is no memory.

"The child fastens his eyes on the bowl, hardly knowing the taste of what he eats, so intent is he on emptying his dish as fast as possible in order to have a second portion. When he is told that he has had his share he fills the air with lamentation. Yet he knows (which the puppy did not) that there was something he wanted, struggled for, and failed to get."

The gaze of the young Artaras hung upon the face of the Princess, but she was hanging upon the words of the Jester as though they were words of the Hermit's wisdom.

"Third there is the youth, old enough to help himself. He wants more than he takes, but he has been running into the Forest, seeking wisdom, so he eats lingeringly, enjoying his mouthfuls, and trying not to long for more. Then the fourth, the sage, takes no thought of the crystal bowl, not because he ignores it, but because there are so many reasons for not asking for the whole dish, so many reasons for not wanting the whole dish; that it is choice and not control that makes him perfectly satisfied with his saucerful—or his apple!"

The Princess looked narrowly at the Jester. "I might almost think that thou hadst been a sage before thou wert a Fool! Take care thou return not suddenly to sage again, for see! there is one already coveting thy honors." She pointed, laughing, to the puppy who had seized the Jester's bauble and was shaking it with all his might.

Just then the King awoke, and the Princess hastened to him; but the handsome Artaras, with his gaze still fixed upon the Princess, sat upon the fountain's rim, frightening the fishes.

ON THE BEACHES

VIII

ON THE BEACHES

THE heat of the salt, baked sand and the cool spray of the Sea swept over the Beaches. In the harbor, boats swung pliantly at their anchor ropes, children waded in the shallow water, sailing their toy crafts, or thrusting at minnows with little spears of fish bone. In front of the fishermen's huts women mended nets, singing the while a song like the ceaseless waves on the Beaches.

The Forest-woman's hut stood among the others, but to her it might have been leagues apart, so far were her thoughts from the sands slipping under the water. She loved her fisher husband, whose bronzed face and brawny strength had won her heart and taken her from the woodland to dwell upon the Beaches; but the restless beating of the Sea, the white glare of the unbroken sands

seemed desolation to her senses and she longed for the green stillness of the Forest. Her soul was filled with terror of the waves as they dashed the boats in broken fragments upon the shore, and she wondered that the fisherwomen could sing, knowing that their husbands were out upon the deep, but the women smiled and said to her:

"Canst thou ever love aught as thou lovest the Sea that sends food and shelter for us and our little ones?"

But the Forest-woman, with frightened eyes, cried:

"I love him not! He fills my heart with dread!"

The women of the Beaches could not understand and answered, "If there were no danger how couldst thou be filled with gladness at thy good man's safe return? We all have husbands; fathers, sons, and brothers too, out upon the broad breast of the Sea. Some he has given back to us after he has kissed their souls away with his cold breath; but others he has kept in his heart forever."

The Forest-woman, separated by this gulf, heard their words with awe and

marvelled that these women could look with calmness at the great, dark Sea who possessed their dear ones.

The wind blew strong as the Forest-woman stood beside her husband in the harbor. She looked into his tender eyes, which asked what troubled hers, and with madly beating heart, she answered:

"I only fear to see thee go in such a wind, for every time thy tiny sail dips behind the rolling breakers I all but swoon with fear lest the waves toss it above, no more to flutter like a reassuring flag before my gaze."

The fisher-husband held her in his arms and smiled, and answered as did the women of the Beaches:

"Why should we be given hope, belovèd, if we knew no fear? Why wouldst thou stand far out upon the dunes watching for the first sight of my sail? How could our meeting give such joy if thou didst not feel that the great Sea gave me always again and again to thine arms?" He held her closer yet until at last her lips smiled bravely, as she whispered, "Then each day that I have thee shall seem to me a life, and all the lives that we have

lived together shall make a hoard of memories to fill my heart in the days when I have thee not."

The boats went out into the wind with their bright sails bending full, like great gulls' wings, and the Forest-woman stood upon the farthest point of sand answering her husband's smile, until distance blurred him from her sight.

All through the black night the storm raged fiercely, the sea rose high with white-whipped waves. In the fisher huts the dim lamps burned flickering and yellow, and the Forest-woman's lamp burned with all the rest. And in the early morning when the Sea, like an avenging god appeased, laid the dead upon the Beaches, the Forest-woman's head, with closed eyes, was pillowed on the warm breast of a fisher-woman, for the Sea had kept both husbands in his heart.

When rapid sharp black days had been followed by endless dull grey ones, the Forest-woman gathered the frayed strands of her life together, but the Sea which had been her dread now became the solace of her soul. She dwelt among her sisters of the Beaches, and

longed no more for her Forest home. In her eyes was the same look that was in the eyes of the fisher-women, looking out upon the water, and she too mended nets and sang the song of the Sea.

And in storms the great Sea pounding on the Beaches seemed to challenge:

"Courage! Courage! Strong as I am was his love for thee. When thou art brave as my strength, thou shalt achieve and go to him again!" When the Sea was calm he seemed to whisper ever and again: "Clear and true like the moon's white rays lighting the blackness of my surface, are the memories lighting thy soul. Only those whose memories, like empty wells, mirror back no radiant recollections, dwell in darkness like a moonless night. Patience, I sing to thee—Peace!"

THE STORY OF THE MYSTIC

IX

THE STORY OF THE MYSTIC

THE Princess sat before the Hermit's hut, her mind intent upon the immeasurable distance between the Hermit and his fellow-men.

She wondered if he had known no childhood; if in his youth he had been a sage? Had his pulses never stirred as those of other men—though the heart of woman must have been drawn to him, as weakness is ever drawn to strength. The more the Princess gained in knowledge, the more she realized that the deepest effort of her understanding did not sound the depth where his lightest thought began.

"Master," said the Princess, "shall I ever see Truth even from afar?"

The Hermit's voice was infinitely kind as he answered, "All things are possible, Laïa, but hast thou weighed the sacrifice such knowledge costs? Wouldst

thou renounce all in this beautiful world save that which might serve as a means for the attainment of deeper wisdom?"

The Princess assented eagerly, but the Hermit shook his head. "Listen, my child, and I will tell thee the story of one who sought Truth:

"In a far distant land, in a time long ago, there lived a man whose name was Rab—but no one called him by name; he was known as the Man.

"From the time of his youth he sat apart upon the high hills holding his spirit out to God—asking God to take it as His own. The men at the ploughs below thought him but part of a felled tree whose shadow might be seen from the fields, but the women said, 'It is a man!' and they wondered what he did.

"Alone upon the hill sat the Man waiting. One day as he held his soul in outstretched offering, he heard the whispering of the Great Spirit which said: 'Man, go down into the valley and toil; for thy spirit in its untried emptiness is not acceptable to me.'

"So the Man obeyed; and his fellow-toilers said, 'He is a good neighbor, for

he works faithfully and harder than we do.' But the women said, 'He works harder, but he works not as we do.' And they cast furtive glances toward the hill-top, where at dusk they thought the shadow was not that of the tree trunk.

"As the years went by the Man accumulated the fruits of his labors. Fellow-toilers in the valley showed him kindness and he was welcomed at their firesides, where rosy-faced children climbed upon his knee. Sometimes in the twilight hours, before the glowing logs, some maid more fair than all the rest sat with him apart—and looked with wistful eyes. At such times into his heart would come the vivid knowledge that he was a *man,* and he longed to take the maiden in his arms, wishing that he too might build his fireside. But the rushing of the wind outside brought to his spirit the call of God! Out into the night and storm he fled to the hill-top, where in a hollow tree he had built his shrine.

"One night when the dwellers in the valley were asleep and the Man waited alone, he heard the Great Spirit's voice:

'He who serves ME must be entirely MINE, and he must sacrifice to ME all he has!' The Man followed the voice far beyond the hills up to the mountain's summit: and there above the gathered storm clouds, high upon a smooth plateau bare and bleak, unreached save by wind and moon and stars; in the midst of this vast space, stood the Man with his arms outstretched!

"Then out of the swirling wind appeared the Great Spirit and the Man fell upon his face. But the Great Spirit spoke:

" 'Lift up thy head and I will breathe into thine eyes, thy heart, thy mind. To thee will I give a part of ME, but from thee will I take all that thou hast. Outwardly thou shalt be as before—a man; but through thine eyes there will shine glimpses of ME. Women will love ME, thinking it is thee; for they, knowing only man, will love thee as a man, but thou with MY SPIRIT in thy heart wilt baffle and bewilder their souls.'

"The Man toiled with the men in the valley and they honored him as a fellow

worker; but the women glanced with wondering eyes at twilight toward the hill-top and holding their children close in their arms went home to their firesides."

THE POET AND THE PRINCESS

X

THE POET AND THE PRINCESS

IN the very midst of the City, where the grey-walled buildings lay close like the cells in the hives of the bees; and where the human workers swarmed in a busy throng, stood the dwelling of Adas, the physician. With him lived his son Avar, the young poet. From his earliest childhood care had thrown her veil about him, and worries crowded on his mind.

To him his father's daily chronicles: that the child of the weaver died in the night, that a coach and four ran over an aged crone too deaf to hear the pound of the horses' feet—these things filled the boy's heart with grief, for as his father told him only the sad tales of life, Avar thought all the houses in the City but screens to hide the sufferings of their inmates. The smoke curling

upwards from the chimneys seemed to him the grey vapor of dying souls; the setting sun reflected in crimson glow on the window glass, was to him the emblem of burning pain; the rain that cooled the sultry City, was to him the weeping of Nature over the fever-stricken land. And so his poems were always in a tragic vein.

At last this brooding spirit overtaxed the frail strength of his body, and his father, seeing in him the likeness of a sun-starved plant, tried the expedient of sending him, for a while, beyond the Forest into the quiet Village on the other side of the Gardens of the King.

Here, in the sunshine, living in a low thatched cottage on the river's brink, across which the Gardens of the King were spread in marvellous beauty, the young poet's imagination rebounded. As in the City all seemed steeped in the grey fog of never-lifting care, so all here seemed radiant in the golden glow of never-fading happiness.

He would lie for hours on the bank of the silver sanded river, gazing across to the farther shore where the Palace stood at the crest of its Gardens, and with

eager eyes scan the nearby paths hoping for a glimpse of the Princess. The smoke floating like soft clouds from the marble chimneys, the setting sun gilding the window panes, seemed to him the joy of life condensed. And he wrote pæans of glory, victory, and delight, in which the Princess was ever portrayed clad in dazzling gold and crowned with stars; her hair he fancied like a mantle made of sunset rays floating in the evening breeze, her eyes like the deep blue of the sky, her lips the scarlet streak of the setting sun.

Thus he stayed dreaming the days away until strength and health returned.

When again in his father's house he tried to forget the greyness of his surroundings by dwelling upon the memory of the Gardens of the King where the sun always glistened, where sorrow was unknown, and where lived that most wondrous being, the Princess. If only he might have seen the Princess, he thought, then he would have had a memory to leaven the sadness of the whole world. Yet in all the time he lived in the Village, Avar never saw the Princess.

One day as he was sitting in the portico of his father's house, planning a new tragedy of which the stage was to be the street before him, and the Palace an ideal Heaven, a messenger of the King appeared before him, bearing an order from Adas to his son which directed that he bring a packet of certain herbs to the Palace without delay.

That illness could enter the Palace stunned the young poet's sensibilities; sooner could he have believed in the suffering of angels, and later as he gave the password to the soldiers who would else have barred his entrance, he found it difficult to believe this could be that very Palace whose other face he loved so well. He was led through courtyards, long passages and vaulted chambers, until his father met him, and leading him through a narrow gallery, left the boy amazed to find that he was standing upon the highest terrace of the Gardens of the King, close to the gleaming walls of the castle of his dreams! Drawing his breath in awe, he looked up at the white walls rising above him, and stood aghast, his heart rent with disappointment because the marble did not

gleam and the surface was but like that of many buildings in the City. He felt the wind damp, the stone paving hard and chill, while all the glistening colors were in the Village beyond the river where the thatched roofs basked in the sun.

"If I might but see the Princess!" he thought, "her radiance would light up this cold mass of stone and it would become the fairy palace it seemed from the other side."

Just then he heard the soft tap of heels upon the mosaic of the terrace, and turning, saw a slender maid whose years might sum the same number as his own. She wore a simple dress of brownish tone, her hair, neither dark nor light, was bound by a fillet of jewel-less gold but fashioned of a wrought design. Her face he first thought plain, but no sooner had he thought it plain than it seemed beautiful; though he wondered that a maid of honor should be so simply dressed.

"Princesses, I thought, had orioles to wait on them, not wrens!" he said aloud, and all at once the maiden laughed. And as she laughed the boy thought he

would write a poem and call it "Laughter."

"And who art thou," she said, "that talk of the Princess and orioles and wrens?"

"I am a poet, Avar by name; my father is Adas, the physician! Who may be thine?"

"My father—?" She drew the arches of her brow together, and at once Avar thought he would write a tragedy and call it "Storm"; and then he heard her voice like the rushing of the wind through his imagery of the storm:

"My father is the King! I am the Princess Alaëia."

Then the poor bewildered youth had no thought at all. He stared, and stared, but saw nothing except his lost illusions that seemed turning into little brown spots like the tiny freckles on the bridge of the Princess' nose.

But the Princess could not read his mind, and his uncouthness made her angry. "Thou art very rude, thou son of Adas, and altogether different from thy father, whom I dearly love for the soothing care he takes of me when I am ill."

"And can it be that YOU are ever ill?" The question hung faltering on Avar's lips. But now the Princess stared.

"Of course I am sometimes ill. The King, my father, is all crippled with the gout; perchance I shall have it too some day. It is only you who have a father to make you well again before you realize that you are ill. Tell me, do you live in the City?"

"Aye. In its midst."

But the Princess drew closer, crying, "Tell me! Tell me of the City, where there is so much to learn, and do! Where the toilers go singing to their work like a busy swarm of happy bees; where the contented smoke of chimneys tells of countless happy homes. Ah, I should like to live in the very heart of the City!"

"No! No, you would not, Princess! There it is all noise, strife, sickness, death; while here all is peace and happiness!"

"Peace and happiness here— Ah, I wonder would you think so long? Each day follows day in monotonous procession, and laughter is but a sound made

with the lips and throat. The courtiers make the same speeches year after year; even Torqueo but makes new jokes by saying the old ones backwards! Think what it is to live always with no new face to see—except on the great days of the feasts; and then there are such crowds that no face stands out clearly amidst the throngs that pass before the throne's daïs, where I stand with the diadem pressing into the very flesh of my head, and my shoulders weighted to the breaking point with the jewels they have to carry. Perchance you call *that* peace and happiness? At first I liked the spectacle; I loved to feel the power of the King, my father, and my soul was filled with the glory of being the Princess Alaëia; but now it neither wearies me overmuch, nor fills my soul with pride; it all comes in the duties of a day—neither more nor less."

Then suddenly the Princess saw that she was causing pain and that Avar was struggling with some sorrow, even as she had often struggled with her own in the presence of the Hermit; and all at once he felt her sympathy and in that moment his tongue was loosened,

and he told her of his sadness in the City and his happiness in gazing on the Palace from the Village side, and how always he had filled his heart with the golden image of herself.

At last when he had told her all, she took him by the hand and led him down the terraces of the Gardens so that the Castle looked as it had done from the Village side, and then he heard her voice and it sounded as if veiled with shadows, like her eyes, which were half hidden under their dusky lashes.

"You thought the Palace the Castle of your dreams—and me, less mortal than other maids, because I am the Princess! Alas, you see your castle close at hand and find it but a pile of stone; you see me close and do not even know me—" She paused. "Do you see the clouds far over in the west, how the setting sun tints them gold and light? Always as a child, and even now, I let my fancy think them fairy cities, and wander down their magic streets. Yet though I know they are but the reflection of the sun upon dense bodies made of mist, what can it matter since what we think they are is so much more real

to us than what they really are? You, Avar, are a poet, and poets always see the world's face gladder or sadder than it is; and if the world showed the same face to me that it does to other maids, I would not be the Princess! So tell me, would you have me show you all the Gardens and the Palace—have you know that life you think so perfect— Ah no, I will not, just *because* you are a poet, I will not show you even those places which I love and find most beautiful, for if you saw them with the eyes now looking at me, they would be but rooms of marble, paths and flowers and green! No, Avar, draw your Palace from the creations of your own imagination—and from time to time will you send me the poems as you fashion them? So that I may try to clothe the real Palace and Gardens with the beauty which you, having seen them only with your poet's mind, shall give to them."

And as she spoke the sun blazed brilliantly through the drifting clouds, and Avar started with amazement; for the sun had made her hair of burnished gold, her dress shone of the metal too, and the golden disk that bound her

brow gleamed like a royal crown. Her eyes were like the blue of Heaven, and her lips were like the streak of sunset red, and all at once she was the Princess of his dreams!

And so she led him back to the postern gate, and when he came again to the City the world was full of Song.

THE HERMIT'S DISCIPLE

XI

THE HERMIT'S DISCIPLE

IN the mellow light when the sun's longest shadows were slowly dissolving into night, the Hermit sat before his door contemplating the river flowing by. Through the Forest came the even-song of birds, and the leaves softly stirring in the breeze crooned the Woodland to sleep.

All at once a strange bird's note broke upon the increasing stillness! A high trill echoed sweet and distant, then the notes varied, deepening into truer melody, until the aria arose in rippling cadences of joy. It was as though the soul and mind of man had been put in the throat of some heaven-born bird, which had descended into the Forest to sing to the others just one time—that they might remember always.

The Hermit, walking softly in the di-

rection of the sound, suddenly stopped. A youth was lying at full length upon the moss, his bent arm framing his upturned face, while from his throat and puckered lips poured all the marvellous melody. Upon the branches of the nearest trees the forest birds chirped now a note, now a trill in chorus.

The Hermit noted the lithe and graceful form above which was set a face, modelled with clean, clear strokes beneath tumbled locks of bronze.

The stranger let the song die out with a long-drawn sigh—like one who, sighing, takes but a deeper breath—not one unloading upon the winds his care. He drew a handful of berries from his open doublet and his feathered chorus perching on his arm and shoulder shared his supper.

The crackle of twigs announced the Hermit's nearer approach, and the birds like flying chaff, blown before a storm, scattered into the trees. But the youth, bounding to his feet, cried eagerly:

"Master, surely thou art he whom I seek!"

"If thou seekest the Hermit of the

Forest, I am he; my hut is near and thou art welcome."

So together they went, the Hermit and the youth with the bird music in his throat, and when they were seated before the hut, the youth began his story:

"All that has befallen me, will I tell thee, but my true name I beg thou wilt not ask—unless thine all-knowing vision shows thee things I would a while forget."

The Hermit answered, "I know naught but that which thou wouldst have me know, until the time when of thine own accord thou wilt reveal it."

The youth looked quickly, but the eyes under the brown cowl might have been two forest pools lying deep in shadow, in which no image was reflected.

"I was an only son, pampered from the hour of my birth. My mother the gentlest lady, and my father the kindest man, left no longing of my childish heart unsatisfied. Through my boyhood no great harm came of this, for I, who loved my mother much, was well content in wanting most those things which she would have me want. As my joy in music was the same as hers we used to

play for hours, she and I,—all the things I felt and could not understand, I put to music. So my boyhood passed, and then as I grew older and my life was thrown with men, they, too, humored me because I was my father's son. Thus I grew to manhood; never having known the slightest opposition to my will.

"According to the custom of my country my father planned my marriage with the daughter of one whose land adjoined our own, but ere our betrothal was arranged that happened which made all thought of marriage, for the time, impossible. There came into my life a woman, beautiful beyond the bounds of imagery; a woman to make a man forget his soul! When she looked at me my brain burned scarlet. Upon beholding her I felt a blinding mist, yet when I saw her not I felt no tender recollection, only restlessness akin to anger. I knew not whether love or hate was uppermost. For in loving her I did hate myself; and hating her I loved myself again.

"My only solace was my music, but the measures I played were filled with vibrant bounding notes, and all who heard me play were stricken with a men-

tal fever; all save she—the one whose witchery made the music through the instrument of my soul held prisoner, under her crimson spell.

"Then came that abominable day when, as I stood in the shadow of a tapestry, I saw a great broad-shouldered brawny man clasp her in his arms, I saw her cheeks grow red, her brilliant eyes grow soft. In madness I rushed out and would have strangled both; but that this woman who possessed my soul became transformed with fury until I seemed to see her eyes grow tawny yellow, her dress of gold become all barred with black, and she a raging tigress. In that moment I little cared what might befall, and in my heart her image was destroyed forever: though all my senses seemed destroyed as well.

"For many days I brooded restlessly, and then at last the stillness of the Forest drew my agitated spirit irresistibly. Thus I became a wanderer.

"At first I wanted only rest, forgetfulness and peace, but by and by my spirit like the new spring leaves strengthened in the lengthening days. My bed was moss under the covering of night, my

drink the water of the Forest pools, my food the buried nuts I found. During all the time I lived in the greening Forest I was silent as the trees themselves.

"At last, one twilight, there broke upon the stillness the song of the returning birds. I did not know a sound could startle so! Then as they sang, the Forest life all seemed to wake, and I too felt a trill arise in my own throat as though I, with the others, was impelled to sing the song of Nature—not knowing why, except for a growing gladness that made my heart expand until the overflow arose bubbling to my lips.

"Thus have I lived the Summer through, spending the days in musing on the mysteries of life, with no word spoken save to one woodsman whom I met some leagues from here. He told me that the path which I had taken led to thine abode; and then I knew why destiny had guided me this way. Through nine changes of the moon would I stay with thee, but when for the tenth time the moon increases to the full, my father has my promise that I will return; in the meanwhile wilt thou keep me, Master?"

The Hermit looked deep into the youth's clear eyes. "It was meant to be, and as such I have no choice but to accept. It is well, Nordeus, for so thou shalt be called whilst thou abidest with me. Enter!"

THE MEETING

XII

THE MEETING

THE Princess and the young Duke Artaras sat in the embrasure of a window in the Gallery of the Queen. At some distance were groups of maids and courtiers, whose laughing chatter sounded high above the low voice of the Princess.

Artaras held the different colored wools the Princess needed in the tapestry she was embroidering, and sighed as though he sought to draw her thoughts from the picture growing beneath her fingers. She bade him choose a thread of azure wool intended for the sky, and as he cut it from the skein, she smiled into the young Duke's eyes; for indeed he was a handsome youth. She knew full well that the drawing of the blue thread through her fingers was like the

drawing of the heart-strings of him who watched, and yet this knowledge added not a single count to the tranquil measure of her pulses.

Suddenly his eyes grew dark through the narrowed opening of their half-shut lids, and something caused a tremor in the breath of the Princess—as a gust of wind might blow over the surface of a pool, leaving its depth untouched.

"Ah, Princess," he exclaimed, "do you who have the power to sway all men's hearts remain yourself untouched by the love which you inspire?"

With a wistful smile she answered, "Nay, Artaras, the love which you desire fills but one side of the triangle, therefore it moves me not. See, love should be like this:" She drew a triangle with the blue thread in the corner of the canvas, and in the center she left the unthreaded needle to mark the middle point. "The three sides, body, soul, and mind, should be in love as equal as the three lines in this figure. If the triangle were suspended by the needle vertically, all three sides would balance —so!—the side falling at its base varying at the slightest breath; or set in

motion, all three sides would merge into a perfect circle."

"I know naught of triangles, but I know much of love! And even though you be of ice, my love in time must melt your heart."

"Once upon a time a youth fell in love with an ice image which, his warm breath having melted, was the image no longer."

"But the image I love is not of ice! Tell me, Princess, what must he be to fill your heart?"

"I ask too much, Artaras! I who less than other maids may hope to realize my dreams."

"Why say you less than others? The Princess Alaëia may choose from all the men on earth the one she wills to be her husband."

"The Princess Alaëia is the daughter of the King! and must marry him who is her country's choice. The poor Prince, her husband, having no more choice than she."

"But should the King ordain that you might choose a husband for love alone, and that is not impossible, does not your triangle swing perhaps from a central

point of beauty?" The handsome Duke threw all the ardor of his heart into his importunity.

But the Princess arose, and her glance travelled over the different courtiers and back again to the Duke, whose beauty far outshone them all, but each like a goldsmith's figure seemed to show the art and labor spent in making, surely of none of these had the Deity said at birth *"Let this be a man!"*

And the Princess sighed for the need of this man and—it may have been the emptiness in her heart that made her smile for the second time upon Artaras. Then she quickly left the Gallery.

Crossing the Gardens of the King she soon stood within the opening of the hollow tree which hid the exit of the Labyrinth. From there she watched the figure of the Hermit, who was pounding grain before his hut.

"Am I becoming fanciful?" she thought. "Surely the Hermit moves as though he had discovered the invigorating wine of youth."

"Aa-lo! lo-ho!" she called. The Hermit turned, but the sun shining upon the

river beyond blurred the features under the canopy of his hood, and the Princess could not see whether he smiled or frowned, as she continued gaily, "Some good thing has surely happened! Master, hast thou built a new temple on the 'Way'? Or hast thou found the herb that will allay man's pain? Or hast thou found a balm to cure the blindness of those who will not see? Truly thou seemest grown in stature and thou—!" She had come close enough to have the blurred haze outside of her line of vision, and had stopped; staring with amazement into the face beneath the Hermit's hood. Instead of the parchment features of the sage, she saw smooth modelling of noble sculpture, instead of the lines and hollows she knew so well, the fresh firm skin of youth. Who was he? Some recollection, dim and mysterious, thrilled her senses; her heart throbbed as though some potent spell held her enchained—and held the stranger too; for neither moved, but each stood gazing into the other's eyes as though lost in the memory of previous births.

Then the memory faded and the Prin-

cess realized a stranger was before her.

"Who art thou?" she asked, perplexed. "Can it be that the Hermit has gone beyond the borderlands and that thou art come to take his place?"

But the figure in the Hermit's dress stood amazed and dumb—had he not with his own eyes seen a wood nymph leave her tree?

"Tell me thy name!" she said again.

"I am the Hermit's disciple—Nordeus he calls me."

"Nordeus," she repeated dreamily, "somewhere I have known that name—Where? When—I cannot remember!"

AS IT IS DESTINED

XIII

AS IT IS DESTINED

CLOSE upon the Sea, so close that the churning breakers creamed and foamed against its Eastern boundary, lay the Moon-garden. On the North, South, and West high hedges shut out the other Gardens of the King, and in the center of this enclosure there stood, like a white lotus blossom in a cup of green, a little Temple. From the steps of this Temple spread an uninterrupted vista of the Sea, and at the Garden's edge, where steep cliffs ran sheer to the water below, was a marble bench curved like the new moon and set against clumps of dense foliage.

The golden mirrored surface of the Sea reflected the rising Sun, and upon the marble bench the Princess stirred. Turning her restless gaze from the swirling spray that dashed against the

cliffs, she let her glance fall upon the columns of the Temple standing fair and calm—emblems of strength, and beautiful tranquillity.

Although the heart of the Princess weighed heavily within her breast; although every wax-white flower and every beauty of marble carving of bench and Temple added actuality to her woe, this Garden of her Fate had drawn her like a lodestone, while all the world was yet asleep.

She had always known that, like the other daughters of her race, she must in the fitting time be given in marriage to the Prince whom Destiny, through the instrument of her father's command, would send. She knew that she must, in the appointed hour of moonlit night, descend those marble steps and give her hand to the husband who would await her in this very Garden. Before another golden sun should rise beyond the purple circle of the Sea, Alaëia, the Princess of Ateria, would be the wife of a Barbarian stranger, the Crown Prince of the North.

In this dawning hour of her wedding-day, despairingly she held her arms up-

stretched, praying the Deity for strength to do the thing which Fate demanded; while through her soul rang one word only, "Nordeus!"

Wider and wider spread the gold reflection upon the surface of the Sea; the soft rosy canopy, all pinned with winking stars, merged into starless blue, and new Day burst glorious upon the waking world. For the last time, the Princess took her way to the Forest, where she sat long with the Hermit in his hut.

"And I complained, dost thou remember, Master, that there was no great thing for me to do! Ah, would I were no Princess, but merely the Forest maid that Nordeus thought me, when he did beseech that I should let him journey to his father asking that he demand of thee my hand in marriage. Bitterly hard it was to tell him that my life was vowed apart from wedded happiness; bitterly hard to frame an explanation which should tell no lie, and yet must end all dreams of love.

"Once I even dared to hope that 'Laïa' might descend the Temple steps and give her heart and soul as well as outheld hands to—Nordeus. Why! why,

must I forswear what other maids may have as their crowning happiness; they are no more flesh and blood than I!"

"Has all that thou hast learned come to this, my child, that thou wouldst set thy puny wishes against thine ordained Fate? What is best for thee, will be."

But the Princess in her grief cried, "Do not mock me, Master! Thou art but a Hermit—and cannot understand. What though thou hast probed each hidden mystery! *Love* is the greatest of them all! Thou art but a Hermit, thou canst not feel as I, who in the flower of my youth must yet forswear its joy." Then overwhelmed with woe she buried her face in her arms.

Perchance the Princess was right, the Hermit did not understand; for as he watched her quivering shoulders, there flitted in the corners of his lips the shadow of a smile, and though his eyes were kind they had the look of one who pities a child solely because it cries, but feels no pity for its grief.

Suddenly from the Forest the Princess heard the music of Nordeus! Her senses wavered between rapture and pain. For his wonderful melody expressed all

that was in her own heart: the tender love of woman, and man's stronger love for her, yet through it ran a strain of sadness—as of farewell to all that life holds dear. Gradually the deeper, fuller notes grew stronger, and to the Princess they rang like Victory!—the Victory of the Soul's conquering, which is stronger than Life or Death.

The Princess slowly raised her head. "For aught I spoke in passion, forgive me, Master, the grief I felt narrowed my vision within the limits of my pain. Fear not that other eyes than thine shall divine my sorrow! To-night I, Alaëia, will descend the Temple steps and give my hand, without one tremor, to my husband, the Barbarian Prince of the North! aye, Barbarian though he prove to be, or puppet Princeling, it little matters to his bride, whom every other maid in all Ateria doubtless envies. Nay—nay, I say this not in lamentation; I was but musing on the mask each mortal wears no less than Torqueo, who, lucky Fool! may wear his brazenly. Ah, dear Master, forget this seeming weakness, for in truth grief shall not gain upon my heart, my very love for Nor-

deus shall give me strength to do my part in being worthy of his memory."

Bending almost to his sandals, she kissed his robe; then pausing for a moment, as though to engrave each detail of the surrounding scene upon her memory, she left the hut.

And as he watched her go, the Hermit's face was radiant.

Near the entrance to the Labyrinth, the youth she loved stood waiting. "Nordeus," she said, "my lessons are learned, and I may come no more to the Hermit's hut. This is our last hour—" Her voice faltered and she could say no further, but the youth cried:

"This hour thy last, thou sayest! Then Fate is kind, for I have that to tell thee which had seemed too hard before: At noon this day my freedom's end has come and I, to keep the pledge I made my father, must return to the country whence I came. But see, the shadows measure to the river's edge and many moments of this last glad day remain."

So together they sat upon the river's bank while in the thoughts of each the subject was the same. After a silence Nordeus began: "Listen, Laïa, for in my

heart there is a song, wherein a moonlit Sea with ceaseless rhythm pounds upon the rocks below a Garden, wonderful as in a dream-world night. Within this Garden, flooded by the moon, two lovers stand, hand locked in hand; their two hearts beating stronger than the rhythmic Sea. Ah, Laïa—let us dream the distant Garden and flooding moonlight all our own!"

But the words gripped the heart of the Princess, for she thought, "It is the soul of Nordeus reading my fate, where the mortal mind of my belovèd may not understand." Yet her lips smiled, for she would not let sadness mar their last moments.

The Sun reached the highest point in the Heavens, and though the color paled upon the lips and cheeks of the Princess, her voice was quiet and her eyes were calm as she said:

"The hour has come which shows how little we may map the destiny of our finite lives; in this moment I may tell thee what thou must have known these many moons, that in leaving thee I leave all that makes life dear—and in this hour the heart of Laïa dies."

But deep in the eyes of the youth there gleamed a little light like a faint reflection from the Hermit's own. "We may not pierce the veil of Destiny, belovèd, we may not even say our hearts, though they seem shattered, are about to die.

"What though this hour be filled with sorrow and the haunting phantoms of future years stretch hopelessly before us! In the great ALL, of what small moment are the years to come, if we remember. Life is but a day and all the glorious morning hours have been our own. What is an afternoon? To-morrow is another day, and to-morrow! thou love of my soul, we meet in our next rebirth."

THE MARRIAGE OF THE PRINCESS

XIV

THE MARRIAGE OF THE PRINCESS

IN the hour before sundown, music sounded in all parts of the City, cannon boomed, and lusty throats grew hoarse in acclamation of the Crown Prince of the North. Alone, in advance of his glittering train, he rode through streets hung with flying streamers and bordered with garlands; through the cheering multitude to the Palace drawbridge, whose heavy chains were transformed into ropes of flowers.

Within the Palace the great Hall filled. The King, the Queen, and all their court, the dignitaries of the City took their places; while all eyes turned in amazement at the majestic bearing of the "Barbarian" who, amidst his splendid retinue, unconcernedly awaited his bride.

Minutes passed and still she came not. The King grew uneasy and spoke with Torqueo, the young Duke Artaras flushed with hope, the courtiers wondered, while the maids of honor whispered that, might the Princess see the bridegroom, never would she delay!

Alone the Prince stood seemingly unmoved.

At last there was a stir! The Princess entered, weighed down by her robe of jewels which with each even step swung forward, and then again hung rigid with each step's pause. The glittering pendants of the heavy diadem fell from her temples to her feet, and over her face were drawn three veils so that none might know what emotion stirred her heart.

The air hung heavy with incense; the echo of the last horns, bells, and cymbals faded; the final invocations had been pronounced. Then the bride's attendants removed her veils and all the assemblage saw her face, wondrously beautiful, though its ivory paleness was intensified by the shadows beneath her drooping lashes.

Not for an instant did she raise her

glance toward him who was now her husband; whereas no sooner had the Prince beheld her countenance than his indifference vanished and he bent forward eagerly with manifest delight in the revelation of the beauty of his bride. Immediately her attendants closed around her, and she was borne to the little Temple in the Moon-garden.

Here her maids of honor arrayed her in robes of shimmering silver, pearls they braided in her hair. Adoringly they lingered over each ornament that might most enhance her beauty for the hallowed hour, when the ascendant moon should reveal her husband awaiting her at the foot of the Temple's steps. Softly, as though in fear of displacing one perfect fold of drapery, her maids withdrew. The departing torchlight dappled faintly upon her loveliness—and then the Princess cast herself prone upon the marble floor.

Like a great dazzling frosty bubble, the full moon hung poised against the indigo sky. Gradually the white shafts of light crept through the Temple's open portal to where the Princess lay.

Gradually, their silent radiance drew near her outstretched form; then spreading over hand and arm and shoulder, their gleaming caresses reached her eyes. Startled, her wandering consciousness awoke to the dreaded hour's demand. Slowly she arose, and then with calm, even step emerged from beneath the shadows of the white-stemmed peristyle, while the caressing moonlight rippled down her trailing draperies.

Midway down the steps she paused, pressing her hands against her wildly fluttering heart; for borne upon the night air, as clearly as though the sound were real, she seemed to hear the song of Nordeus.

With utmost courage she cast his image from her thoughts. Unfalteringly down the steps she went; a gliding breath of light and moon shadow. Suddenly she stopped, bent forward, as she strove to pierce the silvery haze obscuring the features of her husband. One moment she swayed—and then there broke from her lips a rapt inbreathed cry, "Nordeus!"

Within this Garden, wonderful as in a dream-world night, these lovers stood.

No further word she spoke, and no word he; but close, close about her he drew his arms, as heart beat to heart with louder rhythm than the distant Sea.

THE END

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